

PHIL-124-10: Ethics and the Environment

Summer 2021, Main Session 1

Instructor: Beba Cibralic

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Class time: M, T, W, TH from 1-3pm

Office Hours: I will hold office hours after each class and on Friday afternoons by appointment

Course description: The ecological impact of human activity on the planet and on other species raises a number of urgent questions: *What are some ways in which we can incentivise the big carbon polluters to decrease their carbon footprint? How can we prevent species from going extinct? Can we stop the ice caps from melting?* Given the rapid rate at which environmental degradation is happening, it may feel indulgent to take a step back and evaluate some of these critical issues, from factory farming to the climate crisis, in a methodical careful manner. But this slow and careful approach will help us develop the conceptual tools to address environmental problems in a way that does not generate other kinds of ethical harms. Many of the political, social, and ethical issues that shape other facets of our lives, such as structural racism and global inequality, also inform our understanding of the nature of environmental crises and how best to respond to them.

In this course, we will learn how to think about environmental issues in broader ethical, socio-political, and ideational contexts. We will ask: *how complicit am I in unjust food systems? What is the best way to conceptualise animal ethics? Should all climate refugees and displaced persons have the right to resettlement in countries that have contributed the most to climate change?* We will read philosophical texts engaged with these questions, focusing on a different theme each week: 'The Environment and Me', 'Animal Ethics', 'Environmental Justice', and 'Climate Justice'. In the final week, students will have time to work on and present a personal project related to one or more of the course topics.

Readings: All readings will be available on Canvas. There are no required texts for this course.

Course aims:

Think systematically and critically about topics you read in the news;

Empathise with and charitably understand philosophical theories that you may not agree with or share;

Develop the conceptual tools to analyse, evaluate, and critique the philosophical positions we encounter;

Strengthen your ability to create, justify, and defend your views on complex ethical and moral questions; and

Hone your writing and speaking skills so you can articulate your arguments persuasively and clearly.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown:

Write a short paper (2-3 pages) (20%)

Write a long paper (4-5 pages) (30%)

Present one of the assigned readings to the class (15%)

Participate in a class debate (10%)

Write a debate reflection (1-2 pages) (10%)

Complete a personal project (15%)

Detailed descriptions of each assignment will be provided in class.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend each class session, to come prepared, and to arrive on time. Absences for reasons of illness or mental health will be excused; you do not need to provide a doctor's note or a detailed explanation, but you do need to let me know within 24 hours of the class session that you miss.

Late papers: Assignments submitted after the due date and time will be penalised 1/3 of a letter grade for each day, or part of a day, that they are late. (For example, a B+ paper that is one day (or one hour) late will receive a B). An assignment submitted one week or more after the due date will automatically receive an F.

Extensions: If you cannot submit an assignment on time because of illness, injury, or family emergency, please email me as soon as possible to make arrangements. Briefly describe your situation (you don't need to go into details) and indicate for how long you would like an extension.

Plagiarism: Cheating and plagiarism have no place at Georgetown. The onus is on you to ensure that the work you submitted is plagiarism-free. As an instructor, I am committed to academic integrity and obligated to uphold the Honor System. I will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the Honor Council for investigation. Confirmed cases of academic dishonesty result in an automatic Fail (F) for the entire course. It is always better to submit an assignment after the deadline than it is to submit something on time without meeting academic standards. We will discuss these issues in class but please acquaint yourself with Georgetown policies here (honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system) and here (honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/whatisplagiarism).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students with one or more disabilities will be given accommodation when and where possible. Students who have unique learning styles and needs will also be accommodate when and where possible. If you need an accommodation, you should reach out to the Academic Resource Center (<https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu>) and inform them that you are seeking an accommodation.

Feedback on Writing: I will be providing you with guidance on how to write strong philosophy papers. While I am not able to read your paper drafts, we will be conducting peer-review exercises that will help you develop your papers. I also recommend that you check out services at the Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>). Asking for additional feedback on your work does not mean you're a bad writer. I encourage everyone in the class, irrespective of whether you typically get As or Bs or Cs on your papers, to make an appointment with a Writing Center tutor.

Academic Support: Georgetown's Academic Resources Center provides additional support, including academic coaching and individual consultations. For more information, see here (<https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>)

Appealing grades: If you believe that your work deserves a grade different from that which it receives, you may ask for reconsideration. All appeals must be made in writing, submitted within two weeks of the return of the assignment, and must make a case for the reconsideration. If a change is made, it may be to either a lower or a higher grade.

Instructional continuity: In the event of inclement weather, I will notify you of how to proceed.

Mental Health: College can be challenging at the best of times, let alone during a pandemic. If you are interested in speaking with a professional counselor, see CAPS for more information (<https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/mental-health/>). The number to call is: 202-687-6985. You can also check out HoyaWell (this is free and especially good if you're out of state). See here for more (<https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/caps-announcements/hoyawell/>).

COURSE READINGS AND SCHEDULE *(subject to change)*

Theme	Date	Units	Readings	Assignment Due	Additional notes
Week 1: The Environment and Me	June 7	Introduction to 'Ethics and the Environment' and tools for the course	<i>De Bres, "Pink Guide to Doing Philosophy"</i> <i>Ehrlich and Ehrlich, "Can a Collapse of Global Civilization be Avoided?"</i>		
	June 8	Anthropocentrism	<i>White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis"</i>		
	June 9	Individual Responsibility and Complicity	<i>Adrienne Martin, "Factory Farming and Consumer Complicity"</i>		
	June 10	Individual Responsibility and Integrity	<i>Trevor Hedberg, "Climate Change, Moral Integrity, and Obligations to Reduce Individual Greenhouse Gas Emissions"</i>		The prompt for paper 1 will be given out
Week 2: Animal Ethics	June 14	Animal Rights: A Utilitarian Approach	<i>Peter Singer, "A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation"</i>		We will spend the first half of class doing a paper peer-review exercise
	June 14	Animal Rights: A Rights-Based Approach	<i>Tom Regan, "The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights"</i> <i>Mary Anne Warren, "Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position"</i>		
	June 16	Animal Rights and Human Cultures	<i>Paula Casal, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Animals?"</i>		In class, we will watch the film 'Angry Inuk' by Alethea Arnaquq-Baril
	June 17	Animal Ethics meets Environmental Ethics	<i>Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce"</i>		

Week 3: Environmental Justice	June 21	Just Emissions	<i>Tim Hayward, "Human Rights Versus Emissions Rights: Climate Justice and the Equitable Distribution of Ecological Space"</i>	Paper 1 due at 5pm	
	June 22	Historical Accountability	<i>Megan Blomfield, "Historical Use of the Climate Sink"</i>		
	June 23	Structural Injustice	<i>Sheila Foster and Luke Cole, "Environmental Racism"</i>		Debate prompt will be given
	June 24	Applying principles to policy	No reading		In class, we will have a debate
Week 4: Climate Justice	June 28	The nature of the problem	<i>Jamieson, "The Nature of the Problem," Chapter 2 from Reason in a Dark Time</i>	Debate Reflection Due at 5pm	
	June 29	Understanding climate change denial	<i>Karen Kovaka, "Climate Change Denial and Beliefs About Science"</i>		
	June 30	Climate Colonialism	<i>Whyte: "Is it Colonial Déjà Vu?: Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice"</i> <i>Taiwò, "How a Green New Deal Could Exploit Developing Countries"</i>		
	July 1	Climate Displacement	<i>Davenport and Robertson, "Resettling the First American Climate Refugees"</i> <i>Hosein, The Ethics of Migration, chapter 5</i>		The prompt for paper 2 will be given out

Week 5: Personal Projects	July 5	Personal Project Workshop	No reading		We will spend the first half of class doing a paper peer-review exercise
	July 6	Personal Project Workshop	No reading		
	July 7	Workshop Presentations	No reading		
	July 8	Workshop Presentations	No reading		Paper 2 due at 5pm on July 12